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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 000538

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/BSC KBEAMER, EUR/PPD/PA ACERVETTI

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PA](#)

SUBJECT: POPE GRANTS LUGO WAIVER TO SERVE AS PRESIDENT

REF: A. ASUNCION 273

[1](#)B. ASUNCION 358

[1](#)C. ASUNCION 79

Classified By: A/DCM Joan Shaker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Vatican issued a decree July 30 announcing that Pope Benedict XVI granted President-elect Fernando Lugo a special waiver dispensing him of his clerical duties -- the first of its kind in Catholic history. Lugo advisors told Acting DCM that Lugo's biggest worry for months had been how the Pope would react to his presidency; Lugo told Ambassador Cason and Acting DCM late August 1 that he was thrilled with the decision. The Vatican's ambassador to Paraguay, Archbishop Orlando Antonini (referred to as the Nuncio), in contrast, confided to Acting DCM August 1 that many within the Catholic Church were not pleased with the dispensation, but had hoped the Vatican would have taken a stronger stand in opposition to Lugo's politics. An ongoing issue since Lugo first attempted to resign from the church in December 2006, the Vatican clarified Lugo's status at the eleventh hour -- and well after the presidential campaign -- to avoid the appearance of endorsing his candidacy. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) The Vatican issued a decree July 30 announcing that Pope Benedict XVI granted President-elect Fernando Lugo a waiver dispensing him of his clerical duties -- the first such waiver granted in Catholic history. The Vatican's decree mentions the Vatican's attempts to dissuade Lugo from running for president and his suspension from the exercise of the ministry. The decree states: "The recent situation created by the election of Monsignor Fernando Lugo as President of the Republic of Paraguay demands reconsideration, for the good of the country and in order to distinguish clearly and definitively the office of the presidency of the republic from the exercise of the Episcopal ministry... his acceptance of the office of President of the Republic of Paraguay is not compatible with the obligations of the Episcopal ministry and the clerical state ... His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI has granted him the loss of clerical status, with the resulting loss of the rights inherent with it, dispensing him at the same time from his religious vows through the Society of the Divine Word, his obligation to celibacy, and his other clerical duties. The Supreme Pontiff urges Mr. Fernando Lugo to be faithful to the Catholic faith into which he was baptized and lead a life consistent with the Gospel."

[1](#)3. (C) Lugo advisors told Acting DCM that Lugo's biggest worry for months had been how the Pope would react to his presidency; Lugo told Ambassador Cason and Acting DCM late August 1 that he was thrilled with the decision. Lugo said he knew this was a difficult decision for the Vatican, given the importance the Vatican awards legal precedent.

¶4. (C) Nuncio Orlando Antonini, in contrast, confided to Acting DCM August 1 that many within the Catholic Church were not pleased with the dispensation, but had hoped the Vatican would have taken a stronger stand in opposition to Lugo's politics. While the Pope's decree leaves open the possibility that Lugo could return to the clergy once he leaves the presidency, the Nuncio told Acting DCM that Lugo would have to start "from zero," and that his possibilities for re-entering the Catholic hierarchy were "as good as" Acting DCM's. (COMMENT: Since Acting DCM is a non-Catholic female, Lugo's chances are probably better, but the conviction with which the Nuncio made this comment revealed his displeasure with the Pope's decision. END COMMENT). The Vatican's representatives told Emboffs that Lugo's case is neither a laicization nor a temporary dispensation, but a completely unique case.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: An ongoing issue since Lugo first attempted to resign from the church in December 2006, the Vatican clarified Lugo's status at the eleventh hour -- and well after the presidential campaign -- to avoid the appearance of endorsing his candidacy. The Pope's waiver clears the way for Lugo to assume the presidency August 15, and resolves a major issue of concern to Lugo. Now that his last major obstacle to assuming the presidency has been resolved, Lugo can focus on governing with a clear conscience. END COMMENT.

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Robinson